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REMINISCENCES OF A ROCKITE.

[Continued from our last.]

FIRST BLOOD.

As the associates of my drunken jollity were for the most part to be the partners of the more honourable career that had now opened before me, it seemed unnecessary, that in our military character, we should change the haunts we had used as bacchanalians. The poteen-house was therefore still the head-quarters and rendezvous, and never did the moonshine glitter on a temple better suited for the two-fold rite; a priest and priestess more punctual in the presidency, or a set of more zealous votaries altogether than our cabin, our landlord, and ourselves presented. Accordingly, for almost every night during the first week or fortnight after the occurrence mentioned, we wooed the sister spirits of mischief and poteen.

On the last of those nights a circumstance occurred to me, which made such a powerful impression on my mind, and awakened so many of its wildest emotions, that I doubt if I shall ever forget it. Before I launch into the account, I shall briefly describe the situation of the house and its environs, and thus save myself much circumlocution and confusion when I come to the localities of my scenery.—It was a large comfortable cabin, of the old style, with a floor nearly three feet below the earth outside, whether from that unaccountable desire of the peasantry to have low floors, or as an additional concealment, I cannot tell; behind were some rude out-houses, standing at right angles with the mansion, in one of which, almost inaccessible to any unfriendly visitor, the dear destructive beverage was manufactured. The immediate position of the premises was among a cluster of rocky swellings, where the grey limestone, scantily covered by the niggard and sun-burnt verdure, and in many parts utterly bare, by the similarity of its appearance to the rude built walls and roofing of the distillery, rendered discovery from a distant point impossible, or from a near one improbable. A wide extent of bog, whose other border was lost in the horizon, stretched almost to the scrubby point I have described, and afforded it, with but little trouble, and as short carriage as possible, the indispensable requisites of turf and water, a fine clear stream being the only division. Beyond it, on the other side from the bog, the country partook of the same uncultivated, savage character, until it was lost amid the general sterility of that mountainy tract, wherein was the concealed residence of our lawless captain and his followers. In fact, it was so situated that even a friend might wander through scrub and moor, and over rock and hillock for a long summer's day, and yet fail to discover the object of his search, were it not for a large, old ash, which towered on an adjacent eminence, to the view of the whole surrounding country.

As the night referred to had been fixed upon to finish off the chief stock for the ensuing winter, a larger number than ordinary were met to celebrate the joyful occasion. The song and story were put in alternate requisition, and at the close of each, the cruiskeen was sent on its maddening circuit, until one simultaneous roar of drunken merriment drowned all the efforts of the ambitious artists. A loud rapping at the door checked it more suddenly than if the priest himself had come in; fear and doubt were the unanimous features of the whole gathering, until the ragged colleen that attended us went to the door, and on receiving some private signal from without, opened it for the entrance of a small, middle aged man, muscular and wiry, with a bushy beard, and hair that would defy the exertions of the most skilful frizeur in Dublin. On his back was slung a wallet, that betokened his calling, and the few rags that screened him from the winds of heaven, seemed to say but little for his profits. However, with all that easy confidence so peculiar to his caste, as well as other vagabonds, he came forward into the full glare of the blaze from the burning deal, that served us for candles, and with its lurid and awful light gave rather an unprepossessing appearance to our orgies and ourselves, and to the new-comer in particular

"Why, then, boys," said he, looking round, "ye are putting in a night of it; couldn't ye give a body welcome?"

"Shemus! Shemus!" was echoed from all quarters; and then half a dozen sprung from their seats to grasp the rough hand he offered; while "Shemus, avich, here," and "no but here," and "Shemus, agra, with me you know," and every form of uncouth invitation that such poor courtesy could bestow, was lavished on the happy individual; and one of my herculean neighbours, through his eagerness for the close company of that important personage, shoved me half off the best chair, where I had been ensconced as the lion of the night, before the coming of my more fortunate rival. At last he was seated and I began to recognise him as a fellow that used frequently call for small jobs at my house, though the little respect then and there paid him, almost made me doubt he could be the much honoured being before me. He was in reality the general agent of the disaffected in all parts of the country, and had served to extend the influence of our redoubted leader perhaps more than any other individual in existence. He now commenced a tirade upon our recent horrible performances—and cursed all informers in a manner very amusing to his listeners.

"Bedad, boys, ye have the shine of the country now to yeerselves; the Glin lads are beat down intirely; they only kilt one, but ye finished two. Oh! ye're the darlins; an' who's this we have here?" continued the ruffian looking over towards me. "Ah, I'm mighty proud to see you in sich honest company, avich," at length exclaimed he, after recognising me, and at the same time offering his hand with the most provoking air of patronage imaginable. Not considering it very safe to insult such a popular gentleman, I accepted it with as much appearance of humility as I could command, which seemed to soothe him a little, as patting me on the head he went on, "a fine, likely gossoon, heaven bless him; an' on the straight road to glory. Well, avich, an' did ye shoot ere a policeman yet?"

I was actually struck dumb with the fellow's impudence; and the bewildered stare with which alone I answered the question, excited such loud merriment, that I had a little time to recover myself; by that time he was expressing some loud encomiums on our captain, but was interrupted by one of those most familiar with him inquiring,

"Arrah, Shemus, tell us who was he afore he turned out; for some how or other he doesn't look like one of ourselves, at all at all."

"Give us the cruiskeen, then, an' I will," answered he, and after a long draught, that would have inspired eloquence in a bog-stick, thus proceeded:

"Why, then, indeed, it's thrue for you, he's not like one of ourselves; an' myself seen the time when he'd be hard set afore he'd keep company with the likes of uz, until the blow came on him, and then sure he was glad enough to do it. Ye see I can't tell ye his raal name, becase I'm sworn not; but anyhow his father was a great gentleman of the ould stock; an' he had the ould house, an' a bit of land about it that kept him equal, ye see, to the upstarts; an' they got angry at that, an' one o' them, a black villian, took advantage o' the law on him, and dhruv him out of house and land, a beggar, all as one, on the world. Well, my dear, the ould gentleman an' his gossoon, him that's captain now, were thirated mighty dacent by all the honest people about the country; every body offered to keep them, but he was too spirited for that, an' used to work his day's work, though in throth 'twas a poor hand he made of it; but anyhow it satisfied his pride, an' every now and then a present 'id come to him by post of a pound or two from some one that pitied him, for no one dare offer it open; but still it fretted him greatly, to think himself, an' his poor innocent gossoon, should live an' die the way that none of their people afore them ever did; so at last he took courage, an' wrote a letter to a relation, that lived beyant in Spain, or Ameriky, or some where thereabouts, axing him to take them over, an' make a soger or something o' the boy, an' he'd be content with any thing for himself. But still, with all the hope of the good living before him, he couldn't bear the

thought of spending his days away from Ireland, and never see the ould friends and ould sights again; so his poor heart broke within him afore an answer could come back, or the boy's fate be settled; and he had his wish at last, for he died in his own country, and was buried with his own people. Well, boys, a mighty decent wake and berrin he had; an' just when 'twas over, a bit o' comfort came to the orphan in the shape of a letter, from the relation, consintin to take him, and having the travelling money inside, an' away he went, for he hadn't many good byes to say, or much to settle; and though he wasn't much more nor a gossoon, still he was mighty cute, an' understood well what killed his poor father; an' by raison of that, whin he was going away, he swore black vengeance on king an' country, an' more especially the ould villian that was in his father's place, an' all his kith, kin, and generation. Well, after staying a few years with the relation, he become a great pet, an' there was talk of his leaving him all his goold, for he had no child of his own, until an unlucky split kem between them, by raison of his wanting him to marry a great rich lady in them parts, and, bedad, the captain didn't like her; and more be token, he was mindful of a promise he made one Kathleen Carroll, a little girl that was kind to him somehow or other, afore he went; so he renounced them intirely, and came home with little weight enough in his purse, but plenty on his heart; an' more the pity, for as I tould ye afore, he was the raal ould breed. To make a long story short, boys, he married Kathleen, an' with what little he had, bought out an' out a little farm that was jist then to be sould, outside his own right estate, an' was getting on right well, an' had raison, as you'd think, to be happy; for the wife was handsome and genteel, an' brought him one little girl, the only one he'd ever seem to make free with. Well, my jewel, what I'm after telling ye, I had mostly from hearsay; but now I'm going to tell ye what I saw with my own two eyes, an' a quare story it is, as ye'll say yerselves when ye hear it. One time that myself an' my father, the heavens be his bed, was rambling thereabouts doing a little job now and thin when we could get it, we came to his house at the fall of one of the long winter nights, and settled to stay there till morning; we got the failta, to be sure, as every one did, but the sorra a word more, for he was mighty dark and proud, and sat in front of the fire with his little Aileen dhu on his lap; that's her that's in the mountains with him now, an' a fine, likely girl she's grown up, an' the living image o' the mother that was the beauty of the world intirely. But, murder boys, I was running away with the story. I must tell yees, the ould rascal that put his father out was dead, and left a son behind him, that was the darlint of the whole country; kept horses and hounds, and gave parties to the quality, and lived half his time in Dublin, and was, altogether the raal sort of a boy. Well, to turn back to the captain, he sat with us the way I mentioned for a good half hour, with the little crathur on his knee, playing an' coaxing him, but all to no use, till at last a neighbour came in, an' after, 'good look to all here,' an' all that, he asked where was Kathleen. 'I don't know,' says the captain sulkily; 'but I know where she ought to be.' 'Sure enough, you're jist right,' says the other, 'she's where she oughtn't to be, for one that's come from the big house this minute, saw her come out o' one of the plantations with the master, an' she's gone in with him.' My jewel, he flung the child out of his arms into mine, like a clod, and leaped into the middle of the flure, eyeing the man like a wild beast. At last says he, half choked, 'my Kathleen in company with one of that cursed breed—that's a lie, Martin.' 'Sorra a lie in it,' says the other, 'an', more betoken, it's not her first time neither, though nobody liked to tell you of it.' When he heard that, he gave a groan, as if his heart was bursting, and ran out of the house, without hat or any thing. We all followed, but 'twas no use—we couldn't come up to him at all, at all; but we saw 'twas towards the ould place he ran.—Whatever he saw or heard there, no one ever knew from him; but, at any rate, the sarvints tould us after, that the coach was ordered to be ready in the dawn of the morning, to take the couple off to Dublin in all secrecy; an' I suppose he found that out too; for before you'd think he

was there, he was back again, and tould us all to follow him. We knew well what was in his mind, but not a word he said until he gotther a number of the boys; an' them were the boys that were afraid of nothing. 'Deed ye're good, likely boys yeerselves; and I wouldn't like to make little of ye—ye're good, brave boys, and showed yeer pluck right well the other night; but now ye're no more to them boys—no, no more than they were to Fann McCool, as I'll show ye if ye have patience. Well, as I said, he gotther the boys, and tould them what happened, in a long, grand speech, for all the world like a counsellor; and he asked wouldn't they revenge him; and they all said they would; so without more delay he led the way to the big house. One had a gun, another a bayonet on a pole, another a soord, another a stave, all had something or other but myself, for I was only a spalpeen, and besides had the child in my arms, for I didn't like to leave her behind, and no one to take care of her, though the father didn't seem to notice her at all, even when she cried with the cowl, as she did once or twice afore we got there. Well, when we came to the big house it was all bolted and barred, and we made so much noise breaking in, that the chap within guessed what we were at, and ran with Kathleen, that was shouting and roaring, into the parlour, bekase the door of it was the strongest in the house, so that when we came to it, we found all we could do wouldn't break it in. 'That won't do,' says the captain, laughing, 'he shan't foil us this way.' So he got furniture, and barred up the door with it on the outside, and sent a parcel round under the window, that was a good way from the ground; and then, after sending out the sarvints prisoners, he went into a room under the parlour, and made a bonfire of tables and chairs, and boxes, and every thing he could lay his hands on, and came out, and locked the door behind him.—Well, we all knew rightly what he was at, and the blood run cowl in us, but not a word was spoke until the ceiling above began to take fire, and then we heard them opening the door, and trying to get out, but that was impossible, by raison of all the furniture against it. The captain burst out laughing, as if it was the pleasantest job he ever done in his life; and the next minute the shutters were unbarred and opened, and all without was as clear as the noon-day, for the fire was beginning to take head inside; then he laughed louder than ever, 'till at last the unfortunate wretch ran, with Kathleen in his arms in a dead faint, and stood on the window-stool, to escape the fire behind. The first that noticed them rightly was the child in my arms, and she began to cry out, 'mammy, mammy,' so that you'd pity her, and to stretch out her little hands to get to her; then every body saw them, and gave a loud shout, except the captain, for, with all his laughing, the child's call cut him to the heart, and his head sunk down on his hand, and myself thought he was going to fall. Well, as soon as the shout was over, the chap above began to beg and pray that they'd save him, and he'd give up house and land, and never trouble any one about it. 'Yis to be sure,' says the captain, and taking a gun from one of the boys, he fired up at him quietly, and man and woman tumbled headlong back into the fire. He jist looked for a moment in at the window below, and then ordered us all to march the sarvints down to the gate-house, and leave the place to the fire. Bedad the stoutest man there trembled at his voice and obeyed him, so he locked the sarvints up in the gate-house, and commanded them, on pain of death, not to attempt to stir out until morning. A little after they all scattered, and nobody was with him but the father and myself, and the man that brought the bad news; so we went home with him, and there, my dear, he cried like a child for a good long hour, and took poor Aileen from me, and almost swallowed her with kisses. He then went into his room, and made a bundle of whatever he thought valuable, and with it on his back, and the child in his arms, went off to the mountain, where he's living ever since, and that's all I know more nor yeerselves about the captain."

Amid the confused and stammered applauses of his rude auditory, the story-teller proceeded to light his pipe, and whiffing it away, with his eyes thrown round his companions, in evident self-gratulation, and his caubeen placed

side ways on his bewildered-looking head, he formed, for the moment, the most perfect picture of complacency and rakish pride that ever fell to my lot to laugh at. His enjoyments were, however, soon interrupted by the renewed inquiry—

"But, Shemus, aghra, you didn't tell us what happened the boys afther. How did they got off, avich?"

"Why, then," answered he, "they got off as all bould men in the world get off; for good courage always brings good luck along with it, as yeerselves 'ill find out yit, never fear. Not one more nor six of them, besides the captain, was ever swore against, an' they managed to make off to him, where they're all safe to this blessed day, barrin' two of them that was shot, and one o' them dhrrowned a year or two ago. But, saints above, what's this?" exclaimed he, springing from his seat in utter dismay, followed by the whole assembly, as a ragged little boy rushed in, and by the contortions of his body and countenance seemed to warn us of some dreadful danger, for which his tongue could not find utterance.

"Aw, aw, aw!" gasped the terrified creature, convulsed with his exertions, as the tinker rushed forward to seize him, and was checked by his sister, the servant of the house, throwing herself in his way, with,

"Oh! sure you wouldn't hurt the poor afflicted crathur, that's that way from the cradle; he stutters, Sir, he stutters. What is it, Paudh, avich; take time and tell us."

The appearance of the whole group was highly ludicrous, eagerly and vainly watching for the tidings which the boy found it utterly impossible to articulate. At last the tinker roared out,

"Sing it you brat;" and the boy availing himself of that well-known specific to his impediment, chanted forth in admirable style,

"The gauger is coming."

The effect was electric. In a moment the whole house was full of the half naked workmen; each questioning the little informant as to the number, &c., of the enemy, which on discovering to be smaller than is usually sent out on such expeditions, they determined to face, and if possible compel them to retreat. The safety of all depended on this movement, which, however, could be only managed by stratagem, as almost the only weapon of worth amongst us was my gun, on which they did not seem much to rely, and which, at any rate, could be of but little avail against our well-armed opponents. We at once proceeded out on the side the enemy approached. A rude sort of ditch lay in their advance, and in the cover of that we were all drawn up, and the necessary directions given. The moon was pretty bright, and we could see them stealthily approaching, ignorant of our discovery of their intentions; their number was so small as almost to invite more decisive operations; for a moment that counsel was entertained, but, to my ineffable satisfaction, was abandoned, and the original one adhered to, in time enough to save some of our number from the gallows, and more from the bayonet. They were already within a few yards of the ditch, utterly unsuspecting its hostile contents, when a wild yell of defiance running along our line arrested their further progress, and was answered by a harmless volley over our heads from the whole detachment; and then they wavered, and fulfilled my wishes at least, by a speedy retreat. At length, after seeing them, as we thought, fairly out of the neighbourhood, we ventured from our concealment; and having enjoyed some hearty laughs at the expense of the disappointed excisemen, were about to return, when the quick eye of the tinker caught an object moving rather suspiciously in our direction. A hasty examination followed, and then the universally expressed opinion, that the soldiers had returned to the attack, most probably with such a reinforcement as it would be in vain to contend with. Retreat was the only measure proposed, and was acceded to by all but the distiller, who opposed it with prayers and entreaties, that we shouldn't leave him to the mercy of the soldiers, after his decent treatment, and suggesting the possibility of "Mr. ——— shooting the straggler beyant, bad fortune to him!"

Had he proposed to me to blow out my own brains I

could not have been more astounded, and my too evident reluctance made him instantly change his ground.

"Oh, Shemus, aghra! take the gun you, and shoot, for the boy is timid you see."

"Me shoot," shrieked the tinker; "what do I know about yeer guns an' things, or any but this; an' by this an' by that, I'll drive it into the coward's skull if he doesn't; so shoot this minit, or"—at the same time brandishing his hammer over my head, ready to perform his horrid resolution if I persisted in my disobedience. The full misery of my situation presented itself to my awakened senses; now for the first time the consequences of what I had looked on as a frolic began to assume a serious character, and the alternative of dying or murdering seemed inevitable. I looked round for assistance—there was none; all gave a tacit consent to the motion, or shunned interference. Habitually indifferent whether I lived or died, I looked up almost for mercy to the tinker, and his grim eye glared on me full of decision, and the murderous hammer was poised ready for the descent. I grasped the gun nervously, and presented it. Had I attempted an aim I had most assuredly failed, such was my trepidation; but the random shot succeeded. I did not, I could not see my success, for I fell back half senseless on the ditch; but the unearthly groan that followed, and the glad shout of my comrades told me that I had saved my life, and was now—a murderer. They all rushed simultaneously forward to take advantage of the panic which they supposed one death would strike in the hearts of their opponents, and I was alone. I cannot exactly understand now, why the mere act of charitably sending a fellow creature out of this dirty world, should excite such misery in any man's mind: but that may be the effect of habit; for nothing is more certain, than that in that moment of loneliness I underwent pangs which it would be madness to attempt describing. All bodily sense left me; confused recollections of the comparative innocence and respectability of my past life, were placed in horrible contrast with the present and the future; and all these were heightened by the loud laugh of joy that echoed in my ears from my savage companions when they had reached their murdered victim. It awakened me to a deeper sense of my guilt, and the cup was full when that laugh subsided from exhaustion, and the wild cries of the tinker broke on my ear, that but too well recognised them. Gracious heaven! thought I, have I done a deed that even that wretch can mourn—this was too much: I reloaded my gun, and was about to finish my wretchedness, when the return of some of the party prevented me. The laugh was renewed, and they seemed very devils.

"You did it, Sir, you did it!" exclaimed one fellow, amid the convulsions of laughter. "You dhruv the ball through an' through him."

"Who! who!" I shrieked, recovering the power of speech with an almost herculean effort, and the laugh rose louder than ever as I was answered,

"Shemus the tinker's jack ass."

CONTENT—A PASTORAL.

O'er moorlands and mountains, rude, barren, and bare,
As wilder'd and wearied I roam;
A gentle young shepherdess sees my despair,
And leads me o'er lawns to her home.
Yellow sheaves from rich Ceres her cottage had crown'd;
Green rushes were strew'd on her floor;
Her casement sweet woodbines crept wantonly round,
And decked the sod-seats at her door.

We sat ourselves down to a cooling repast—
Fresh fruits! and she cul'd me the best;
Whilst thrown from my guard, by some glances she cast,
Love slyly stole into my breast.
I told my soft wishes: she sweetly replied,
(Ye virgins, her voice was divine!)
I've rich ones rejected, and great ones denied,
Yet take me fond shepherd—I'm thine.

Her air was so modest, her aspect so meek,
So simple—yet sweet were her charms: